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Educational Problems of Bilinguals in Elementary Levels

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Abstract

Differences between morphological and syntactic structure of Arabic language on one side and Persian language on the other, is a significant factor causing problems in speaking, reading and writing skills of Persian at elementary level in bilingual areas ,in the south of Iran, where Arabic speaking children are supposed to learn Persian at school. The participant samples of this study comprise 60 teachers and students of 6 classes of the schools in these Arabic speaking areas. The samples were chosen by an accidental multistage cluster sampling. All the students of the sample were Arab bilinguals living in the south of Iran, Khuzestan Province. The data were gathered through teacher and student questionnaires. 5 Persian- speaking monolingual students were chosen by the same sampling method as the control group and they were interviewed by the same questionnaires. Descriptive statistical method, including percentage, frequency, and average, were used to analyze the quantitative data; then the quantitative and the qualitative data obtained were analyzed. The findings show that the most frequent morphological problems of these learners are in verbal inflections (mode, tense, number ...) and subject-verb agreement. They have non-linguistic problems who reinforces language problems too.

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1. Introduction

Arabic, is unrelated to Persian in terms of historical etymology. Arabic is a Semitic language, belonging to the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. Arabic is structurally too different from Persian which belongs to the Indo-European language family.. There are a lot of structural and lexical commonalities among these languages and

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Persian. Arabic and Persian have important syntactic and morphologic differences and the interference of the two languages in the first year of preliminary education is responsible for many of the language skill problems in Arab bilinguals. One of these differences is the canonical word order .Whereas in Persian the dominant word order is SOV, Arabic has the dominant VSO word order. On the other hand ,there are important morphological differences between the two languages (Arabic and Persian).In Arabic, there are a set of base letters and verbs and nouns conjugate in different ways to make verbs of different tenses and nouns with different meanings in this language.

2.Methodology

Considering the fact that Arabic language is not from the same language branch as Persian, bilingual Arab students in Iran have different kinds of linguistic problems when they use Persian as the language of education. We can say that the present study was done to find out the speaking , writing reading and also non-linguistic problems of these students.

The participant samples of this study are 60 teachers and students of 6 classes of the schools in Arabic speaking areas. The samples were chosen by an accidental multistage cluster sampling. All the students of the sample were Arab bilinguals living in the south of Iran, Khuzestan. The data were gathered through teacher questionnaires. The answers came in the form of Likert-type 5 choice scales and also open answers. Students' behaviors during instructions were observed too and they were interviewed with the same questions assessing their speaking skills during the first three months of the educational year. The interviews were recorded and after completing a form for each student, the average was calculated for each class. Five monolingual students from Tehran who are native speakers of Persian, were chosen by the same sampling method as a control group. Descriptive statistical method, , was used to analyze the data.

3. Findings

According to the findings, Arab students in the elementary levels in Iran have speaking errors in using the correct adjective meaningfully, errors in using the right colour terms and they can't distinguish comparative or superlative adjectives. These students have less problems in correct use of nouns. The finding related to the morphological structures show that the students do not have any problems in using the nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns which are shared by their mother tongue and Persian. We can demonstrate the findings in the following charts for language skills:

A) SPEAKING

Chart (1) the average correct use of morphological structures in speaking for word types:

pronouns	adverbs	verbs	adjectives	nouns
1.95	65.1	84.1	16.2	8.2
25.2	09.2	09.2	74.2	22.3
81.2	69.2	89.2	3.61	77.3

B) WRITING

Chart (2) Frequency of Writing Problems

15	Problem in holding the pencil
15	Unfamiliarity with the lines of the ruled papers
5	Failing to recognize the directions of the writing papers
16	Failing to comprehend teachers' instructions
11	Failure in regarding the proper curvature of the writing symbols
14	Dropping the phoneme of the word
13	Problem in writing polyphonic letters
11	Misplacing the letters
13	Dropping letters
6	Misplacing the dots
10	Problem with serrated letters (curvature and number of serrations)
6	Writing in the opposite direction
6	Upside-down writing
5	Writing by heart
31	Lack of agreement between subject and verb
10	Misplacing the words
45	Inability in making/writing sentences

C) READING

Chart(3) Frequency of Reading Problems

30	Misreading the sequence of the letters	Recognizing the letters
40	Misreading caused by mistaking the proper place of the dots over or under the letters	
45	Mispronunciation	
15	Problems with multifunctional letters	
55	Interference of the local accent	pronunciation
30	Problems in reading word with more than two syllables	Problem with the rate of reading
30	Failing to use suprasegmental features	
14	Interference of the intonation of their mother tongue	
4	Failing to halt properly between sentences	
20	Problems in syllabification	
13	Reading by rote	Comprehending words and sentences
14	More problems in comprehending sentences than words	
10	Problem with	

D) NON- LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS

Chart (4) Frequency of Non-linguistic Problems

	Cultural problems		2- equipments and educational aids		Educational syllabus	
20	Cultural and Economic Poverty	51	Inappropriateness of the equipments for language learning	20	The mismatch of educational books and students' everyday life	1
20	The problem crowded families whose children do not receive decent attention	10	Lack of appropriate Supporting Educational books	17	The mismatch of the textbooks	2
18	Families are illiterate and cannot help student's with their lessons	12	Lack of educational aids to improve students' comprehension	10	Failure in comprehending lesson which need verbal explanations	3
10	Parents do not cooperate with children	18	Lack of audio-visual equipments	0	Problem in comprehending the course of Qur'an	4
18	Conflicts inside the family and among the ethnic tribes	14	Lack of speed reading flash cards	8	There being unfamiliar words in the educational books	5
28	Bias in favour of the local dialects	17	Inappropriateness of the educational space	7	There being difficult words in the educational books	6
9	Children are involved in cultivation and herding			14	Book illustrations are boring	7
4	Irregular migration of the tribes			20	Inappropriateness of the books' fabrics and bindings	8
16	Popularity of the TV channels of the neighbouring countries			17	Limitation of the educational time	9
15	Lack of pre-school preparatory classes in villages and among the migrating tribes			18	Inappropriateness of the teaching methods	6
8	Lack of decent attention to sanitation					

4. Discussion and conclusion

Bilingual Arab students of Iran use nouns more properly and more effectively than the other parts of speech; their most frequent problem is with using the verbs. Considering the fact that many (about 50%) of Persian words are borrowed from Arabic, this result is expected. They have difficulty in using time adverbs, comparative adjectives, and proper sequence of nouns and adjectives. The results also show that these students have problems with the syntagmatic relations among the parts of the sentences. The prefer to use the template of the written form sentences in their speech, do not usually use successive sentences in response to questions; their use of successive sentences is accompanied with syntactic and semantic errors. The structural differences between Persian and these children's mother tongue may be an effective factor in causing such syntactic problems. Qualitative findings also show that the frequency of problems in answering questions is significant among the bilingual Arab students; especially at the beginning of the educational year, when teachers ask questions of the bilingual children, they answer with consternation, cry, stay silent, or answer only with yes or no. They usually cannot answer long questions or the ones which are posed for the first time. They sometimes give irrelevant answers to the questions or repeat the answers given by others; questions must be repeated or clarified and sometimes the

teacher needs to translate the questions into children's mother tongue. on-linguistic problems interfering in the language learning process of these bilingual students are as follows: inappropriateness of the instructional books, inappropriateness of the teaching methods, limitation of the teaching period/time, shortage of educational equipments of in the schools, lack of the 1-year pre-school preparatory classes, crowded families, illiteracy of the family members, ethnic conflicts, bias towards local dialects, popularity of the (non-Persian speaking) TV channels of the neighboring countries, etc..

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